

# HISTORY OF THE UEC

Engineering was one of three initial Faculties in the University of Western Australia. In 1913 the Engineering School was established miles from anywhere in the bushlands of Crawley Bay in the old homestead of Sir George Shenton. The School buildings at the time consisted of the old homestead, a large stable, some low lean-to sheds and three milking sheds.

In 1919 the ranks of the School were swelled by the return of ex-Serviceman and the current dance craze led to the holding of the first Engineering ball that year. No records of this remain until 1921 when a general meeting was held on June 20 to elect a Ball Committee. The success of these early balls resulted in the formation of the Club.

The University of Western Australia Engineers Club (UEC, for short) was formed on September 8 1921. A Mr. Morrison moved that an organization to be known as D.B.A. (Dirty Bastards Association) be set up. This was amended to D.B.A. Club and was launched onto the university. Some dissatisfaction may have remained in the minds of the committee as to the interpretation given to the name, as on May 26 1922 a Mr. Lemon obtained a change of name to University Engineers Club.

The UEC crest was designed by Eric Montifiore and drawn by Don Munro and George Manners for the 1929 Ball. It was decided to have the design contain the necessities of Engineering Life. The original design had 3 counters or pennies however this has been changed to 3 dice. The assistance of Associate Professor Wood of the Classics Department was sought in arriving at “non loqui, sed facere”; the Latin version of “not to talk, but do things”.

Profits from these UEC social activities were used to fund actions of particular significance to the students. One of the first items paid for was the Hancock memorial window in Winthrop Hall and the Engineering library was also established with money provided by the UEC.

In the 1920's the Engineering students also came into contact with other students at the University of Western Australia on a more regular basis. The Senate had spent a great deal of energy arguing about the most suitable permanent site for the University – they were torn between King's Park, Government House and the Crawley campus – but between 1927 and 1932 the entire University moved to Crawley to join the Engineers. As part of this process, the Engineering Faculty also gained a new building, constructed in 1927 by the Public Works Department of the State government. The building, which cost £8825 at the time, still stands at the University, now acting as the Tavern.

R.J. Fitch recalls that:

*“The facilities were less than primitive. Shenton House, with its accompanying galvanised iron sheds standing knee deep in wild oats-the latter posturing as laboratories-constituted the School's entire establishment until mid 1927, when the two story brick building alongside Shenton House was opened.... To all intents and purposes laboratories did not exist. There were a couple of boilers from the former Subiaco power stations, and an assortment of derelict items of machinery which we students tried to assemble and mount on concrete foundations which we had constructed previously by hand.”*

This building was partially constructed by the Engineering students and Fitch recalls that in 1930, *“we spent one afternoon a week mixing concrete and laying down floors in the laboratories.”*

Indeed, even a graduate from the 1940s, F.J. Buchanan, remembered that

*“The various Departments were located in pretty crude out buildings much in the manner of an old fashioned farm, and one often thought the term laboratory was a gilding of the lily.”*

The Engineering Faculty also began to enrol women in the late 1960s. The first female graduate was Miss R.K. Clarke, a Civil student, who completed her degree in 1970.

*“In the old days the U.E.C. emblem was entrusted to the safe keeping of one of the students, who kept it at his lodgings. One day, during his absence, two of the Science Union's more experienced cracksmen were*

*detailed to blind the landlady with science and filch the banner. Claiming to be Engineers, these low types approached the unsuspecting landlady, and asked for the banner, quite truthfully explaining that it was "wanted for a Uni. ceremony." The landlady (God forgive her, for she knew not what she was doing) handed it over.....*

*It was not until the night of Graduation Ceremony 1942 (sic) that the Engineers found an opportunity to get revenge on the Scientists. Surrounded by an overstrength bodyguard the Scientists' banner moved into Winthrop Hall. Although they kept close to the wall and provided almost impenetrable protection on three sides, the stinkers forgot to provide an "umbrella." An enterprising Engineer on the balcony above hooked it up with a fishing line and shot downstairs with it before the stunned scientists awoke to what had happened."*

*"It was the habit of most students, during classes, to smoke profusely.... particularly [at] structural engineering lectures given by Professor Blakey, who also lit up several cigarettes. Lighting a cigarette for Prof. Blakey was a solemn ritual. He would take a fag from the packet and always put the cigarette in his mouth with the cork tip end outermost. Once striking the match to light it, would then reverse the cigarette and put the cork tip between his lips and apply the lighted match to the outer end. This ceremony was repeated on every occasion he smoked a cigarette. Towards the middle of the lecture, after about one hour, the air in the room... was just a blue haze, the smoke was so thick it was difficult to see what was written on the blackboard and I, personally, felt very drowsy and wanted to have a snooze."*

– Gordon E. Randell, Bachelor of Engineering 1947.

Engineering students built the pond outside Winthrop Hall before its official opening. They thus had a certain proprietary feeling about this pond and their right to throw others into it.

The Mech lab was the venue for the welding lesson given to one George Grljusich. George was abducted by the Riot Squad as a payback for when the Lawyers sentenced me to be pelted with tomatoes in the stocks on Whitfeld Court. It was the only time such punitive action took place at the Engineering School, and this was probably a bad decision, as I seem to recall the process of welding George by chain to a length of 8"x4" RSJ was discouraged by a staff member, rather than by legal argument. As usual the Lawyers distorted things, with Chief Justice Porky Malcolm claiming in the "West – Inside Cover", Sept 22 1998, that George had actually been rescued by retired Supreme Court Justice Terry Walsh.

What led up to all this? For some reason the Lawyers rose above their station and felt that they should be taken seriously. Such delusions could not be left unanswered. The UEC leaders of the day decided to form the "Committee for the Upholding of the High Prestige of the UEC"; – otherwise known as the Riot Squad. This made only a few formal incursions. The first was when it marched behind the Banner to extract Blackstone Society President Bob Nicholson and other Lawyers from a Guild Council Meeting, and ponded them.

The Lawyers decided to apply legal proceedings, and punishment in the form of a set of Stocks that were set up on Whitfeld Court. Unfortunately on the day concerned I happened to be seen in Broadway buying a paper and I found myself kidnapped and carted to the Law School off Fairway. I was stripped to underpants and hauled off to Whitfeld court and locked in the stocks. There was a good crowd on the lawn and great amusement as I was ceremoniously tried for being an Engineer and convicted to pelting with tomatoes.

This was of course quite humiliating and the mood changed when a group of former St Hilda's girls were angered and started throwing tomatoes back at the lawyers. However serious help was to come from another quarter. A UEC lunch time meeting was in progress when one of the Tommy More College Engineers returning from lunch burst in shouting "they've got Wittenoom in stocks on Whitfeld Court." The result was quite amazing – Engineers came from everywhere, through the arch (on foot) and around the Ref (by car). The stocks were literally torn apart to release me and Lawyers were unceremoniously ponded.

John Brearley